

## THE SOAP OPERA OF HENRY VIII AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ANGLICAN/EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH

When Martin Luther was criticizing the Church, Henry VIII was one of Pope's biggest supporters of the Church. However, he quickly changed from being a supporter to a dissenter, let's try to understand why.

**HENRY VIII** became the King of England when his father, Henry VII died. His older brother (Arthur) predeceased him. Henry's rise to the throne was less than fifty years after a battle for the English throne between, known as the War of the Roses (called the War of the Roses because the flags/pennant of each warring family included a Rose) occurred. For Henry VIII it was clear that his position as King was not necessarily very secure.

Oddly, Henry ended up marrying the wife of his now dead brother, **Catherine of Aragon** (Aragon is a province in Spain). In order to marry his brother's wife it was necessary for Henry to get a "dispensation" (waiver) from the Pope. Catherine of Aragon was the aunt of **Charles V**, the leader of Spain, the Holy Roman Emperor and the most powerful man in the World. At the time Charles V was fighting the French over disputed Italian territories, as a result, Charles V became the Pope's protector.

Henry VIII was an incredibly learned man, one of the best educated Kings of his time, with the help of two of the most famous Christian humanists, **Erasmus**, and **Thomas More**, Henry defended the Church against the criticisms made by **Martin Luther**. Henry VIII argued so strongly on behalf of the Pope that he became known as the "Defender of the Faith."

Henry's defense of the church began to ebb when he started to have personal problems. Once married, Henry VIII and Catherine arranged to marry their first daughter to the son of the King of France. As discussed many times, this was an effective way of diplomacy in the Medieval ages. Catherine first marriage to Henry's brother was an arranged marriage.

Unfortunately, Catherine had only one child, a daughter, **Mary**, and all her other pregnancies ended up as stillborn births (possibly because she was older than Henry VIII and the likelihood of problem pregnancies rise with age). With only one child and a daughter at that, there was a substantial risk that upon their daughter's marriage to French Royalty, the English Crown would end up in France, possibly joined with the French crown. This was not acceptable for Henry since up to this point, women were not allowed to be rulers in England. Having met another woman, **Anne Boleyn**, Henry decided to divorce Catherine and marry Anne so that he could have a son (Henry thought it was Catherine's fault he didn't have a son and the stillborns were a God's punishment for marrying his dead brother's wife). To divorce, Henry needed a Papal dispensation. But the Pope was in no mood to give Henry a divorce (even today the Roman Catholic Church does not generally allow divorces). The Pope had already gone out of his way to give Henry a dispensation to marry Catherine and now Henry had the nerve to argue that his marriage to Catherine was never valid because the Pope shouldn't have bent the rules in the first place. Under church law a person was not allowed to marry the spouse of a dead sibling. Moreover Catherine did not want the divorce and her nephew, Charles V was well aware of that. Because Charles V was

protecting the Pope from the French King (remember a couple of hundred years earlier the Church had a crisis when a French King tried to Kidnap a Pope causing the Great Schism that only ended 100 yrs earlier), this gave the Pope a second reason to not want to grant Henry a divorce.

Henry then came up with a new idea, after fruitlessly trying to get a divorce, Henry met with Parliament and with their agreement took the Churches land and eventually created the Church of England (also called the Anglican Church or the Episcopalian Church), totally splitting off from the Roman Catholic Church. This new church would be ruled by the monarch of England. The Church would now be a national church, un beholden to anyone but the King. Thomas More, the Christian humanist, counseled Henry VIII not to violate the Roman Catholic Church by getting divorced. Rather than respecting More's opinion, More was subsequently beheaded. Later, because he was martyred on behalf of the Church, the Roman Catholic Church beatified More, who is now known as St. Thomas More.

Much to Henry's dismay, his new wife, Anne did not have a son but rather a daughter, **Elizabeth**. Although Henry had been quite attracted to Anne, he later beheaded her (on charges that she was cheating on him). Henry subsequently married three more times, before one of his wives finally had a son, Edward, he became King for a brief time, but died young and heirless. Before his death, Henry passed a law in the Parliament, which for the first time allowed a woman to become head of State. After Henry's son, Edward died, Henry and Catherine's daughter, Mary became Queen.

Mary, (Catherine of Aragon's daughter, was raised Catholic) was not happy about the establishment of the Church of England and what her father had done to her mother. Once on the throne, Mary sought to restore the Catholic Church in England. Interestingly, she also married Charles V's son Philip II (who was also her second cousin once removed). Philip II was an incredibly devout Catholic who clearly supported Mary's attempt to bring back the Catholic Church. Mary later became known as "bloody Mary" because she beheaded so many people. But after only 5 years on the throne Mary died of cancer. Under the Act of Succession, Elizabeth became Queen and Head of State. Elizabeth reversed Mary's religious policies and now the Church of England was back (Act of Supremacy). However, Mary made sure that the Church of England would include many of the customs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church (Act of Uniformity). As a result Anglican services were almost indistinguishable from Roman Catholic. Later this would upset many people in England, especially that group of people that came to be known as the Puritans. Ironically, now Catherine's ex-husband, Philip of Spain sought Elizabeth's hand in marriage, but Elizabeth never married and became forever known as the virgin Queen (the State of Virginia was named for her).

In the 16th Century Spain was the most powerful country in Europe and after his father, Charles V stepped down from the throne, Philip took over a vast and enormous empire. To restore Catholicism and expand his empire, in 1588 Philip launched a naval attack on England that became known as the **Spanish Armada**. Though England was much weaker, England fended off Spain and Elizabeth became a hero to her people. The loss to England signaled the beginning of Spain's decline.

Dissension often breeds dissension and In the early 1600s the Puritans felt that the new Church of England wasn't strict enough (too much like the Roman Catholic Church) so

they broke off from the Church and established their own "heaven on a hill" in what would become known as the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

In the later 1700s the Anglican Church in the United States became known as the Episcopal Church (largely due to anti-British sentiment during the American Revolution). St. John the Divine in New York City, is the US seat of the Episcopal/Anglican Church.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Questions Prot. Reformation

Fr: 1/31  
due Thursday Feb 7

- 1.. What problem arose when Henry VIII wanted to marry Catherine of Aragon
2. What was Catherine's relationship with Charles V of Spain?
3. What was Charles V. relationship with the Pope?
4. Why was Thomas More executed?
5. Why did Henry VIII create his own religion?
6. Who was Catherine's daughter and what was her religion?
7. What was the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity?
8. Who led the Spanish Armada of 1588, and what was his relationship with Mary and Elizabeth?
9. What group of people remained unhappy with Elizabeth?